The Armoury

'We do not intend to spend this campaign fighting ghosts.'

- From a report on Faction Paradox, filed by the 79th Sontaran Assault Corps.

Despite its talent for irritating and/ or appalling the other Great Houses, at heart Faction Paradox is a bloodline in itself, and like all bloodlines tends to think of its own House as being a single entity: a thousand-year-old process, in which each individual is merely a servant of the family line. As a result, when new members are recruited from the lesser species it's common for the Faction to think of them as tools, as weapons, as extensions of the Faction itself rather than as actual people. When the Faction uses technology, that technology's often biological in nature, designed to "upgrade" agents into more efficient tools.

It's perhaps unwise to think of the Sontarans as a 'species', as such. A homunculus breed, hatched by the million and engineered for full-engagement warfare, the Sontaran military machine is regarded by many time-active cultures as an 'occupational hazard': a force of nature rather than a race, compelled by duty and genetics to acquire new technologies for its endless war effort. It should be remembered, however, that with the backing of a higher power even the crudest of breeds can become something quite different…The principal weapon of any Faction recruit is the side-arm which he or she has bound to him or her during the initiation process, but to understand what this means it's first necessary to explain the relationship between Faction Paradox and what might be called shadowplay.

Shadows are an important part of the Faction's culture: perhaps it's only to be expected, given the family's obsession with carnival-style stagecraft. It's a belief of the Faction, for example, that the state of a member's shadow deteriorates with exposure to the rituals/ procedures of time-control. Though trained Faction agents have the ability to move from one point in history to another without much difficulty, each time the process is used the traveller's shadow is thought to become slightly weaker, until the time comes where a veteran agent could lose it altogether.

Again, it's difficult to justify this belief in terms of conventional science. The implication seems to be that the more an agent exposes him/ herself to the rituals of Paradox, the less real he or she becomes, until eventually the universe itself will forget that he/ she exists and not even bother to apply the usual physics of light and shade (it's hard not to think of the old vampire legends here, the idea that vampires don't cast reflections because they're somehow less than natural). Once again, it has to be remembered that the techniques of Faction Paradox are based on the principle that a perceived universe is easier to manipulate than any actual universe. Whatever the scientific reality, the fact that members believe the continuum itself to be turning its back on them says a lot about the way they see themselves.

The point is that in the lore of the Faction, the shadow's a symbol of the greatest importance. Losing your shadow is, at least for new recruits, a concept not unlike the medieval fear of losing your soul. Yet this belief has led to the development of a very specific technology, or possibly a very specific kind of ritual, practised by Faction Paradox but not by any other House: shadow-weaponry. On full initiation a new recruit always goes through a ceremony of binding, or armament ritual, in which a weapon of his or her choice is somehow attached to his or her own biology (a ceremony which has, incidentally, never been witnessed by anyone outside the "family"). The effect of this ritual is unclear, but opponents of Faction Paradox have discovered to their cost that after the binding, the Faction's agents are in some way able to use their shadows as if they were weapons in their own right.

There's a certain logic to this, at least within the Faction's own philosophy. The shadow is an extension of the self; in a sense, it's the link between the physical body and the mysteries of the time-control rituals ergo, this shadow-tool is the best weapon an agent can possess.

The Faction has other armaments at its disposal, of course, most of them far more conventional. However, agents in the field (i.e. the outside universe) usually operate under cover, and as a rule don't travel with heavy weaponry. Only those stationed inside the Eleven-Day Empire are generally found wearing the Faction's distinctive combat armour, distinctive because each suit is wrought out of the skeleton of a being slightly larger than the wearer, the bones held in position by self-repairing sealant and laced with bio-mechanical systems designed to directly link the armour to its user. Naturally, the suits are built for combat in a wide range of environments, and therefore provide the wearer with both air and pressure-protection. The decision to use bone as the basis for the suits was partly an aesthetic one - the Faction once again flying in the face of good taste - and partly to do with the ritualistic nature of all its hardware: there is, according to Paradox lore, great totemic power stored in the bones of dead giants. (For more on the nature of these giants, see the notes on the Yssgaroth in the History section.)

Faction Armour

Some Design Notes

Though the armour of Faction Paradox is variable in form - inevitable, given that it can't exactly be mass-produced - all the suits have key features in common, with significant variations being found between cliques (or cabals) rather than between individuals: most personal customisations of the armour are purely aesthetic. The suit seen here may not exactly be average, but it contains most of the usual fixtures. Note also that different models of armour are worn under different conditions. For diplomatic (and purely ritual) occasions Faction agents wear no real armour apart from their ceremonial headpieces, while in open warfare they tend to favour lighter, more flexible, less elaborate protection. The suit seen here might be described as the armour of standard bearers, worn on the battlefield - if the War can be said to have any real battlefields - but designed to make a specific impression. Typically the Cousin-proteges would wear this model of armour, allowing them to act as go-betweens for the Mothers and Fathers while under fire. As a result, this suit can best be described as part armour and part carnival construction, and its heavy use of skull-and-spines imagery may be more than a little tongue-in-cheek.

1. **Headpiece**. Far more elaborate than the standard ceremonial masks [see the Book of the War cover illustration]. The Military Wing tends to bring out the Faction's more exhibitionist tendencies, understandable considering that among its members ritual's far more common than actual battle.
2. **Faceplate**. The features of the armour-suits have an animalistic quality simply because of the parts used in their manufacture. Though bat-like cranial structures are most common, the wearers' habit of

personalising the faceplates often make the original breed difficult to identify.

3. **Handling Gloves**. The heavier versions of the armour include gauntlets specifically designed to handle the dead-time/ deep-time resources of the Houses. Both Faction Paradox and the Remote employ heavy-duty handling gloves when collecting time-engineered or entropic materials.
4. **Ribcage**. Various kinetic dampers are set into the fabric of the suit beneath the original skeleton, suggesting that the bone itself offers very little real protection. The entire torso section is jointed at the sides of the body (allowing it to be opened and removed as a single unit).
5. **Enhancements**. In many cases sensory reinforcements will be set into the headpiece, although this practice is increasingly uncommon: in step with the newer methods of the Houses, these enhancements are now more often coded into the biodata of the Faction's recruits.
6. **Quills**. Not universal, and purely decorative. Though in general quills are only seen at the larger ceremonial events, every full-sized suit of armour is likely to feature at least one item of personal significance to its owner, usually welded into the suit's basal structure. Feathers aren't unknown.
7. **Armpieces**. As with the ribcage, the protection offered by the bone is apparently minimal. Here the original skeletal structure is held together by at least one layer of forced-matter sealant, which not only insulates the wearer but frequently irritates enemy monitoring techniques.
8. **Spurs**. Theoretically, in close-quarter combat the sharpened edges of the larger bones can be used as weapons. Realistically, in a War of this nature close-quarter combat is almost unknown and in the field the suits are chiefly used while putting their occupants into the right positions. Most time-active battle is about placement above all else.
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